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Nathan Goldberg

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Phillips, Lytle boosts minority scholarships

BY NATHAN GOLDBERG

The Buffalo-based law firm of Phillips, Lytle, Hitchcock, Blaine & Huber has doubled its commitment to minority scholarships at UB Law. Beginning in the 1997-98 academic year, the Phillips, Lytle Scholarships will be awarded to four students instead of two, who will each receive a cash grant of \$2,500. This increase represents a pledge of \$10,000 per year, or \$40,000 of total support to the Law School over the next four years.

The Phillips, Lytle Scholarship was established by the firm in 1991 and has thus far awarded 15 scholarships totaling \$37,500.

"Phillips, Lytle has long believed in the importance of a diverse legal community," says Peter Braun '74, a partner with the firm.

"The purpose of the scholarship is to encourage this diversity in the local bar by providing financial support to minority or otherwise disadvantaged law students who have expressed an interest in practicing law in Western New York."

This year's recipients are: Jonathan S. Beane '98, Rochelle D. Jackson '99, Brandon A. Portis '99 and Brenda L. Torres '98. Criteria for the award include: "membership in a minority or other group that is traditionally underrepresented in the legal community of Western New York; factors demonstrating especially strong character, experience or ability; intent to remain in Western New York after graduation and a commitment to this geographical area; financial need; and academic record."

The relative scarcity of men and women of color in the local law community is something that scholarship recipient Jonathan Beane believes needs to be addressed. "I think that the national underrepresentation of minorities in this field is something that is more of a problem here than in other metropolitan areas," says Beane.

While acknowledging that the reasons for this lack of diversity are complex, Beane says that it is more important to focus on reversing this trend in the future. "I think that what Phillips, Lytle is doing with this scholarship is really important, both for minority students and for the community." Beane, who received his undergraduate degree from Dartmouth, will be taking a summer clerkship with a judge in Raleigh, N.C. before returning to Western New York.

For one recipient, Buffalo's geographical location offers a unique opportunity to pursue her interest. "Because we are so close to Canada and because of NAFTA, I think that Buffalo will be a good place for me to learn about international law in a very practical way," says Rochelle Jackson, a native of New York City. Jackson was recently accepted onto the Law School's Jessup Moot Court Board and hopes that the experience on the international moot court might help her acquire a summer clerkship with Phillips, Lytle, which represents many Canadian businesses with commercial interests in the United States.

William Trezevant '93, who is an attorney for the National Labor Relations Board and was one of the first UB law students to receive the award, hopes that the efforts of Phillips, Lytle signal a larger trend in the local legal community.

"I think that the current discussion of racial issues happening in this country at the national level will help to spark greater change at the local levels," says Trezevant.

As president of the Student Bar



Left to right: Jonathan S. Beane '98, Vice Dean Alan S. Carrel '67, Evelyn Pennington '98 and Aoka A. Tucker '98

Association during his third year at UB, and in his current role at the NLRB, Trezevant has had a lot of experience with small non-profit organizations. He recognizes that these groups need the support of the university, UB alumni and Buffalo law firms.

"UB Law," says Trezevant, "by providing excellent, challenging education at moderate cost, maintains an environment of inclusiveness that really is encouraging greater minority representation in the area. I think that Phillips, Lytle has also helped in this respect, and their award underscores their desire to effect positive change in Buffalo."

Kedra Jones '92, who received the award the same year as Trezevant and is currently an associate in the trial department at Phillips, Lytle, agrees. "Phillips, Lytle has shown their commitment to minorities not only at the student level, but also in terms of retaining minority lawyers and supporting them in a comprehensive way."

Brandon Portis, another recipient, is glad that Phillips, Lytle is encouraging talented law students to stay in the region. "I grew up in Buffalo and it's always been my intention to practice law here," says Portis.

"While the money from the scholarship is not going to cover a student's entire law school education, it certainly helps. But, more importantly, I think that Phillips, Lytle is setting an example by offering this type of assistance." ■